

Japan Christian Activity News

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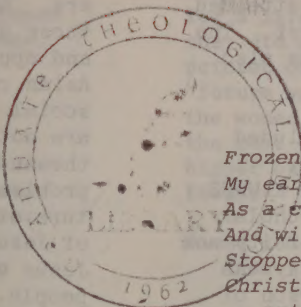
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NATIVITY

A candle forest
Christmas
Guided by a star
Spotlighted by the star shadow.
Our lives hurriedly
Rush toward the light.

SUZUKI Yuji
Cerebral palsy
5-35 Mitoshima
Fuji-shi 416



Christmas Eve

Frozen snow tolled underfoot,
My ears listening
As a crowd of footsteps approached,
And with the sound of snowsteps
Stopped in front of the house.
Christmas carols coming in
out of the snow,
The candle light in each hand
Dyed the snow
with the color of warm human skin.

Outside the gate
"Merry Christmas! Take care."
Echoes of cheerful voices
Left young foot prints.
Closing my eyes I lay down,
My awareness chasing the sound
of steps on the snow
Toward the gate of my neighbor
lying ill.
Wholeheartedly I went along
With the shining footsteps
across the snow.

TOCHIORI Tazuko
Muscular dystrophy
1-4-54 Nagama-shi
Kanazawa-shi 920

those who would
give light
must endure
burning



From Bicutan Prison - the Philippines

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THE CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

Aiko CARTER, KANZAKI Yuji, LaVerne
KROEHLER, Helen POST, Cathy THOMPSON
David SATTERWHITE, YANAGIDA Ikuko.

NATIONAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL Room 24, 2-3-18 Nishiwaseda, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160 Japan

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NCC MISSION AND SERVICE MEET

The Mission and Service Division of NCCJ sponsored a conference on "Affluent Japan's Mission in Asia," which was held at Amagi Sanso, Izu, from Dec. 1-3. About 40 pastors from all over Japan attended, including a Roman Catholic priest. The Anglican Archbishop of Burma was also present.

Speakers for the conference included General Secretary SHOJI Tsutomu, John NAKAJIMA, SATAKE Akira and KAWASE Iseko. Dr. Satake is a Bible scholar now teaching at Hiroshima University and Rev. Kawase is the pastor of a Kyodan church in Kamakura and chairperson of the NCCJ's Women's Committee. SHIGENO Nobuyuki, a Lutheran pastor, also talked about conditions in Osaka's Kamagasaki area and Tom TAKAMI of Asia Rural Institute made a presentation. The chairperson for the conference was KISHIMOTO Yoichi.

Rev. Shoji in his report, put the WCC conference held in Melbourne, Australia last summer into a global perspective. Rev. Nakajima applied the message of that conference to Japan, giving the Kyodan's reaction to it. Then Rev. Kawase spoke to the situation from the point of view of the local Japanese church, where the leadership and the majority of members are from the conservative middle class with no desire to change Japan's social structure to their disadvantage. Their comfortable life style makes them uneasy about change. At the bottom of our church structure are women laborers and others for whom life is difficult and who would profit from a change in the structure of society. How do we bring the gospel message to these different persons?

Rev. Takami spoke about mission from the Asian point of view. He spoke of how Japan, including the church, is the oppressor in Asia. Even when its intentions are good, the Japanese church is aggressive and squeezes out smaller, weaker groups. In the past the church could not stop military invasion and now it cannot stop the economic invasion, but the church today doesn't even want to. Most church members want to be comfortable and don't want to be annoyed. How can the church be liberated from this situation?

During Bible study Dr. Satake, the leader, talked about the meaning of wealth. He used Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Why are the poor to be so happy? He reviewed social injustice in the prophetic era. Amos criticized the government of those days, for most people were poor and oppressed. The same is true now in Asian countries. How can we change the social structure? Wealth and poverty are not problems which can be handled at the individual level but they are social problems. We want to change the structure of society quickly, but the answer of Jesus is the cross and suffering. Jesus was always with the oppressed people.

In concluding the conference Rev. Kishimoto used Acts 3:1-9. Christians want easy, comfortable life but underneath they long for deeper meaning. In this scripture passage the beggar wanted money but his real needs went much deeper. From a human point of view our present situation seems hopeless, but Jesus and Paul had hope in their even more difficult circumstances. "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplex but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." II Cor. 4:8-10.



FROM THE NCC MISSION AND SERVICE CONSULTATION

a parable by Tom TAKAMI

The other day at the Asian Rural Institute ten baby pigs were born. Each was a different size. The smallest one was half the size of the biggest piglet. They seemed to know which of the mother's nipples gave more milk than others, and the bigger piglet went after the one that had the most milk. The smallest one had no choice but to suck a nipple that was left. In this way the piglets grew. The big one got bigger and the smaller one stayed small. As soon as it was feeding time the big pig ran to the food and ate; in the meantime the other pigs could not get near the food. Then it was the middle sized pigs' turn and at

last the small one licked the bottom of the bucket.

A year later the big pig was much bigger and now wallowed in the food until it was full and contented. Now you can see which pig is chosen first to go to the slaughterhouse. The smaller one did not have a chance to grow much, so he was slaughtered last.

The relationship between Japan and other Asian countries in many ways resembles these pigs. At present Japan is heading down the road to destruction, and the church may also be walking down the same path. #



THE FARM WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

On Nov. 21, Ms. NISHIZAWA Emiko, journalist, made a presentation at the Japan YWCA on the farm women's movement after 20 years of experience among them. The following is a translation/summary of the presentation:

Who are the Farmers? It is difficult to decide just who are farmers nowadays, since many are working at factories part-time in addition to farming. In this paper those farmers who get their major income from sources outside of farming are also included. The farmers have often said that 90 per cent of them are women.

Government statistics from 1979 indicate that 62.3 % of the farmers are women, and 37.7 % are men. Of these, 38.6 % are women between the ages of 30 and 59.

It can be said that middle aged women are a major source of support for farming in Japan. In Shizuoka there are many cases where husbands are full-time workers in the car industry and wives are part-time workers and also carry on the work of rice growing.

The survey shows that generally women are very weak in making decisions, especially as to what and when to plant, although they realize that they are supporting the

family by farming. Of those responding in the Shizuoka area, none of the farmers wanted their children to continue farming even though half of the people who answered said that farming is something that they themselves want to continue for a lifetime. Those who answered that they did not wish to carry on farming pointed out that it was "tiring" and the "future was uncertain." 64.3 per cent of the women were high school graduates and the rest of them had had some type of higher education in the agricultural field.

Women's Group Activities Nine out of ten women belong to "Chifuren" and/or the "Nokyo" women's division. However, 80 per cent of them feel that they do not want to join the women's movement on their own but will automatically become members. This trend is becoming more and more apparent. The young farmers complain that the leaders are all aged people and the younger generation does not have a chance to be trained as union members.

While Chifuren includes women who have many kinds of occupations, the Nokyo group limits its membership to women who are engaged in farming. Their most popular programs are agricultural technology, chemical insecticides, the uses of farm machinery and the sales market. The next most popular program is knitting, and third place is sports such as volleyball.

Background of Women's Groups In 1880, in order to improve the life of rural people, the first women's movement, "Hotoku-kai" was formed among the wives of leaders and professionals in villages. Buddhist groups and the YWCA also started around this time. After the Sino-Japanese war in 1890, all women's movements were led by the military powers, defining the role of women as that of taking care of the kitchen as their contribution to the country's economy. Centering in urban areas, more and more women's groups were organized in order to strengthen the military. Women over 20 years old were reorganized into three major groups.

In 1945, at the end of WW II, all of the women's groups which had been disbanded came out with different names, but with the same people in positions of leadership. Within a few years 640,000 out of

25 prefectures were organized under the Nokyo women's division. In 1953 and 1954 when the weather was unusually cold the damage to agricultural products was considerable. At this time the role of women in the Nokyo organization was discussed. The two basic objectives of the movement were "to protect the rights of farm women and to cooperate in work."

Present In cooperation with the con-
Work sumers' movement they were successful in bringing down the price of color T.V. sets. In Aomori prefecture, within one and one half years, the movement to not buy cola was successful. Women encouraged everyone to drink 100 per cent apple juice, which was the major product of the area, for the sake of their health. They pointed out that cola advertisements appeared in the Nokyo publication. When the company protested to Nokyo that they would take the matter to court, the Nokyo women's group accepted the challenge, thereby gaining the support of the mass media.

Nokyo women, cognizant of the fact that many people have started to take part-time work in factories in addition to farming, went out to meet with factory workers. They discovered that they were working night hours. As a group, they protested to the company and got the working hours shortened to eight hours with a one hour lunch period. They were also successful in building nursery schools for the children of working women.

At present, the largest farm women's group is Nokyo, which has 2,660,000 members. However, among the executive board members in the Nokyo organization there are no women members. The "Seikatsu Kaizen" organization has 17,000 groups with 320,000 women members. Chifuren in Hiroshima has an active membership in the peace movement. Nagano Nokyo women responding to Chifuren published a book on women's war experiences as their contribution to the peace movement.

Generally speaking, it takes more than ten years for such organizations to accomplish a major objective. There are no labor protection laws for women that apply to farm women, so Nokyo's goal for the next ten years is to put into effect labor laws involving safety standards for women farmers. #

LOVE AS A PROFESSION

Mr. APUZEN came to Japan at the invitation of NCCJ in order to discuss various problems in the Philippines and Japan. He observed the conditions of the workers in various parts of Japan.

With my mother's Methodist and father's Presbyterian background I grew up in the Christian Missionary Alliance Church. As a student I participated in youth groups, prayer meetings and the church's volunteer activities in the slums. I believed that these good deeds were a Christian's duty and would count toward a ticket to heaven.

While I was studying at Silliman University I became acquainted with various social movements which responded to and confronted inhumane conditions. I often questioned myself as to how I could respond to these inquiries at a time when the church tended not to become involved in social issues.

Just at that time in my country in order to expand a sugar plantation, 500 farmers were ordered to move off of their land. Instead of asking for help from the church they came to the students' organization. We asked the Catholic and Protestant churches to cooperate in solving the problem. Some people warned us that such social issues could divide a church and it would be difficult to expect help from the church institutions as a whole. But some of the individual Christians were willing to help. When the workers needed help the church gave them extra clothes, but the church never did have a chance to get at the root of the problem. From this experience I questioned the validity of the church organization and was convinced that faith is something personal, that faith is strengthened through struggle.

Being a lawyer, my time is occupied now by various problems of laborers such as cases of delayed or unpaid salaries. Many times the laborers' human rights are ignored and they do not have a way to prove their case in court. Even when I am convinced of victory and the rightness of their cause, more than 90 per cent of the laborers lose their cases, because of injustice within the system itself.

love as a Profession..)
though I may have no power within this
ill social structure I believe that I am
participating in an act of Christ's love.
The teaching of Jesus, "Love your neigh-
bor", is not only just words or an abstract
idea, but it must be acted on among the
people. #

MANILA THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION

"CHURCH, STATE, PEOPLE"

The Christian Conference in Asia sponsored a theological consultation in Manila, November 10-13, on the theme: "Church, State, People." Attending from Japan were the Rev. SHOJI Tsutomu, NCCJ General Secretary, and Dr. KUMAZAWA Yoshinobu, Tokyo Union Theological Seminary. Rev. Shoji reports his impressions.

It is notable that the CCA Consultation on "Church, State, and People" was held in the Philippines, the only Asian country, excluding Australia and New Zealand, with a Christian majority in the population. The relationship between Church and State, a crucial subject in Asian countries, was discussed from the point of view of the "people."

Representatives from the Philippines explained how Spanish and U.S. colonialism used the church as a tool for controlling the people. They evaluated ways in which religion has deprived a people of their own culture and kept them poor. Even today 85 per cent of the people are poor farmers, urban laborers, or mountain people. It was pointed out that the church must take a new direction -- to serve the oppressed and help them acquire power to influence history instead of remaining its victims.

A local pastor confessed, "Being a Methodist pastor in a village I was successful in converting more people into that denomination. But I soon realized that the lives of the villagers had not changed. They remained as poor and suppressed as before. I thought about what I had done! This was the important turning point in my realization of the situation."

Because Christians are the majority in the Philippines there are many problems in the institutionalized church system. A few people are really struggling with this subject.

In Japan, Christians are a minority, tempted to accept the views of the majority without any critical evaluation. It is important for us to be a creative minority in our predominately non-Christian culture.



IZUMO SHRINE SEMINAR

By N. R. Thelle

The NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions sponsored a seminar for missionaries on November 16-18, 1980 in order to study the cult and traditions of Izumo Shinto. Forty-five missionaries of various denominational backgrounds including Roman Catholics, Episcopalian, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Covenant Church members and Quakers observed closely some of the religious festivals of Izumo.

The Izumo Great Shrine is located in Shimane prefecture. The foundation of the Shrine is even recorded in the "Kojiki" and "Nihonshoki" which are the oldest written documents of Japan. The ceremonies of the Shrine are related to "Ōkuni-nushi" (The Lord of the Great Land) and Susanoo who, according to related myths, were expelled from the high planes of heaven by the Sun Goddess, "Amaterasu." From the Edo period on the Shrine has become famous for bringing about good marriages and annually four million people visit the Shrine.

There are 73 different festivals in the shrine. We observed one of the traditional festivals, "The Festival of Welcoming of Gods", a week long festival starting from November 17. According to the old lunar calendar this date is October 11. Thus in the old calendar, the month of October was called "Kannazuki" (the Month without Gods), since all the gods were believed to gather at Izumo. Therefore in Izumo this same month was changed to "Kamiarizuki" (the Month of the Gods.)

The seminary program included a ceremony at the beach when gods were summoned and brought in procession to the great shrine where they were enshrined in a number of smaller shrines built for that specific purpose.

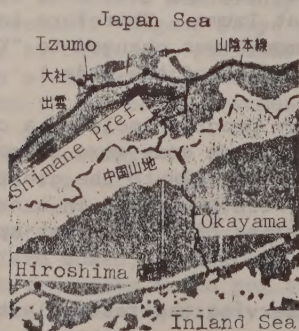
Besides observing the festivals the program
(continued on p.6)

included lectures by one of the Shinto priests about the Izumo cult, and by a local pastor who related the difficulties of Christian work in a culture penetrated by Shinto.

The participants encountered the Shinto religion which has kept a strong link with the mythological past without asking any penetrating questions or feeling the need to theoretically explain the various practices. When the problem of destruction of the natural environment was raised by one of the participants the Shinto lecturer responded by emphasizing the Shinto orientation that no industrial project or construction work is begun in Japan without a Shinto group purification ceremony and a ceremony after completion, praying to the gods for their protection and goodwill. However, the lecturer failed to indicate that Shinto might contain any ideas that would lead to opposition to such projects or that Shinto might refuse to perform such rituals when the construction work involved required violent destruction of the environment. As expected, the great differences in the Christian and Shinto understandings of sin, evil, pollution, purification and forgiveness were brought into sharp focus.

In this regard the Shinto representative not only failed to deal sufficiently with the questions but did not even seem to understand that there was any real problematical difference. The Yasukuni Shrine issue was also raised, but the Shinto authorities had asked us in advance that such issues be avoided and the question was not answered.

The seminar at Izumo was the seventh in a series of yearly seminars for missionaries. Apart from the study of various religious traditions this was characterized as a truly ecumenical encounter for the Christians that participated in this program. #



KIM DAE-JUNG: EMERGENCY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND WORLDWIDE PRAYERS FOR HIS LIFE

The fate of Mr. KIM Dae-jung, south Korean Christian politician currently appealing a death sentence to his country's Supreme Court, continues to be the focus of international prayers and concerns. Word from the families of co-defendants in Mr. Kim's case had indicated a government intention to carry out the death sentence within days of the Supreme Court's ruling, which in turn was expected early in December. Responding to this tragic likelihood, churches and civic organizations worldwide have built up a momentum of prayerful appeals that Mr. Kim's life be spared.

In Tokyo, for instance, a prayer vigil on December 5 began with a sunrise service in the Christian Building in Nishiwaseda, continued with a joint Protestant-Catholic prayer service at Shinanomachi Church and a candle-light walk to St. Ignatius Church in Yotsuya, & concluded with an all-night prayer watch. Churches throughout Japan and worldwide have been asked to include Kim Dae-jung in their prayers at Christmas and into the new year, and further joint prayer services have been scheduled for December 23, 24, and thereafter.

Several governments have taken steps to make known to the government of the Republic of Korea their sincere concern that Mr. Kim's execution would act counter to the interests of peace, security, and justice in the whole of Asia-- serving as it would as a sign of unjust intolerance in a portion of Asia devoted to upholding democratic liberties. The parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany voted unanimously to urge that Kim Dae-jung's life and freedoms be preserved. The United States, in turn, sent Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to Seoul for the sole purpose of asking that Mr. Kim not be put to death.

As part of the worldwide climate of concern, the National Christian Council of Japan and the Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace sponsored an "Emergency International Conference to Save Kim Dae-jung's Life" on Dec. 10 and 11 in Tokyo. Attended by representatives of the World Council of Churches, the Evangelical Church of Germany, and the Protestant and Catholic churches of the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand from overseas, as well as a wide range of political, church, & intellectual figures from within Japan, the Emergency Conference passed a resolution to be shared with governments and churches attesting to Mr. Kim's integrity and faith, & appealing that he not be put to death. Continued prayers for Mr. Kim, and for democracy

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by Sadao
 Watanabe

The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
 those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shined.

(Isaiah 9:2)

Merry Christmas to you all!
 — JCAN Staff